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LAURENCE L. BONGIE

## **The Eighteenth-Century Marian Controversy and an Unpublished Letter by David Hume**

Scotland in the middle of the 18th century witnessed the beginnings of what proved to be a prolonged revival of vehement debate over the ill-fated career of Mary Queen of Scots. Focal point of the "Marian controversy," as it was already being called, was then, as it perhaps still largely remains today, the battle between Mary's detractors and partisans over the authenticity of the famed "Casket Letters."

A very summary recapitulation of the origins of these letters could go as follows: on February 10, 1567, Henry, Lord Darnley, consort of Mary Stuart, had been murdered at the Kirk-o'-Field as the result of a conspiracy in which, it was commonly said, James, 4th Earl of Bothwell, had played a leading role. Three months later, on May 15, Mary Stuart became the Earl of Bothwell's wife. The "second honeymoon" was short and troubled. On June 15 Mary surrendered to her rebellious lords at Carberry Hill while Bothwell made good his escape to the fortress of Dunbar. One week after this, James, 4th Earl of Morton, let it be known that his servants had found and seized a silver casket in the possession of one of Bothwell's retainers. The locked casket was broken open in front of witnesses and a certain number of documents were discovered including eight letters allegedly written by Mary to Bothwell proving her full complicity in Darnley's murder. Discovered too was a series of poetically irregular but very passionate sonnets from the romantic queen to her flagitious lover.

The contents of the casket were subsequently produced by order of the Regent Murray before various bodies and notably at Westminster on December 14, 1568, before a body of English commissioners appointed by Queen Elizabeth to investigate the mutual accusations of the Scottish lords and Mary Queen of Scots. Mary was then, as she remained until 1587, the year of her execution, a prisoner of the English.

It is impossible here to relate, even in the briefest of terms, the long drawn-out and probably endless controversy regarding the genuineness or

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spuriousness of these famous letters.<sup>1</sup> Suffice it to say that for all of the 18th century historians and critics who dealt with the question, the issue was almost hopelessly obscured by uncertainties concerning the actual text of the letters produced by Murray and his associates before the various investigating bodies. The originals were said to have been in France but had last been heard of in 1581 when they passed into the possession of William, 1st Earl of Gowrie, after the execution of Morton, accused in turn of complicity in Darnley's assassination. Despite the insistence of the English ambassador, Robert Bowes, Gowrie had balked at complying with Elizabeth's request that these documents be returned to England for safekeeping. With Gowrie's execution for treason in 1584, the precious papers completely disappeared.<sup>2</sup>

Not long after the close of the Conferences, various translations of these documents had been published; and, by a curious confusion, it was popularly assumed for almost two centuries that the well-known published French version, dated 1572, represented the original text shown to the English commissioners in 1568. It can thus be easily imagined how the cause of Mary's apologists was seen as achieving an enormous advance in 1754 when Walter Goodall proved conclusively that the printed French text in circulation was not the supposed original French at all but a vitiated translation from George Buchanan's Latin and his Latin itself a translation from what Goodall termed "the Scottish original forgery."<sup>3</sup>

The controversy was pretty much at that stage of development when, five years later, in 1759, two of the most celebrated 18th century historic accounts of Mary Queen of Scots appeared in Robertson's *History of Scotland* and Hume's *The History of England under the House of Tudor*.

<sup>1</sup> See S. A. Tannenbaum and D. R. Tannenbaum, *Marie Stuart Queen of Scots, a concise bibliography*, 3 vols. (New York, 1944-46).

<sup>2</sup> Robertson in 1759 stated that "after a diligent search, which has lately been made, no copy of Mary's letters to Bothwell can be found in any of the publick libraries in Great Britain." (William Robertson, "A Critical Dissertation concerning The Murder of King Henry, and the Genuineness of the Queen's Letters to Bothwell" appended to *The History of Scotland during the reigns of Queen Mary and of King James VI till his accession to the crown of England* (London, 1759, 2nd edition, II, p.35).

<sup>3</sup> Walter Goodall, *An Examination of the Letters said to be written by Mary Queen of Scots, to James Earl of Bothwell: Shewing By intrinsick and extrinsick Evidence, that they are Forgeries. Also, An Inquiry into the Murder of King Henry* (Edinburgh, 1754), I, p.80.

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Hume and Robertson, though they worked out their positions independently,<sup>4</sup> and though they held opposite views concerning Mary's share of guilt in the Babington conspiracy, proved to be in fundamental agreement with respect to the authenticity of the Casket Letters.<sup>5</sup> Both historians were even more than willing to grant their friend Goodall<sup>6</sup> his premises concerning the spurious French translation. They insisted quite rightly, however, that his conclusions of forgery did not follow unless he was likewise able to prove that these French documents in the available printed form represented also a true copy of those produced by Murray and his party in the Scottish parliament, at York and at Westminster. Goodall, they maintained, had taken elaborate pains in his work of 1754 to prove something that, in fact, no one had ever denied.<sup>7</sup> To Goodall's

<sup>4</sup> Much to Hume's regret, it would seem: see *The Letters of David Hume*, edited by J. Y. T. Greig (Oxford, 1932), I, pp. 287-88, 292, 294; *New Letters of David Hume*, edited by Raymond Klibansky and Ernest C. Mossner (Oxford, 1954), p.46. See also the new letter below.

<sup>5</sup> Robertson's position has been described as "middle-of-the-road" and as leaving the issue "more open" than Hume's account. (See E. C. Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (Edinburgh, 1954), p.413 and "New Hume Letters to Lord Elibank, 1748-1776" edited by Mossner in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, IV (1962), 449, note 6.) It is true that Robertson in his "Critical Dissertation" proposes only to "assist others in forming some judgement concerning the facts in dispute," and he makes some pretense of stating the proofs produced on each side. He makes it clear, nevertheless, in this as well as in other writings, that he himself believed Mary to be guilty. We even find some of Mary's apologists at times attacking him in terms more vehement still than they saw fit to use against Hume. (See, for example, John Whitaker, *Mary Queen of Scots vindicated* (London, 1788), III, p.8; Louise-Félicité Guinement de Keralio, dame Robert, *Histoire d'Elisabeth, reine d'Angleterre* (Paris, 1786-88), III, pp.362, 379.

<sup>6</sup> Who as sub-librarian of the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh and "seldom-sober" assistant to Hume once assaulted the prank-loving Scottish philosopher when awakened from a day-time nap by Hume's deafening roar in his ear to the effect that "Queen Mary was a whore and had murdered her husband" (Mossner, *Life*, p.252). Robertson acknowledges Goodall's help in obtaining documents for his own work "though," he adds, "he knew my sentiments with regard to the conduct and character of Queen Mary to be extremely different from his own" (Robertson, *History of Scotland*, I, p.vii). In a letter of 1759 to Robertson from London, Hume writes: "Tell Goodall, that if he can but give me up Queen Mary, I hope to satisfy him in every thing else; and he will have the pleasure of seeing John Knox and the Reformers made very ridiculous" (Greig, *op. cit.*, I, pp.299-300).

<sup>7</sup> See Robertson, "Critical Dissertation," pp.24-26; Hume in a letter to Sir Alexander Dick of August 26, 1760, wrote: "It was not surely Goodall, who forc'd Dr Robertson & me, to allow that the French Copy of these Letters was not the Original, but a Translation of a Translation. For the very Title Page of the Book bears it; and it was never conceiv'd to be other wise that I know of." (See Klibansky and Mossner, *op. cit.*, p.59.)



credit it must be noted, by the way, that he had clearly foreseen this objection but had dismissed it on the grounds that those contemporaries who were familiar with the original letters would have protested on seeing the spurious translation. "Would it not," Goodall had already pointed out, "be a very wild supposition, and equivalent to yielding the cause, to alledge that papers reckoned of so high importance, had been published in words and expressions quite different from those in which they were originally written, although in the same language, even at the very time while the dispute was hotly carried on, whether such papers did, or ever had really and actually existed in the Queen's hand-writing?"<sup>8</sup>

If we turn now to Hume's general treatment of the Queen of Scots in his *Tudors* we see that, despite his classical concern with painting an elegant and balanced portrait of historical personages, his account of Mary's behaviour was largely a statement of the prosecution's case. This is not to say, of course, that his narration of her troubled career was entirely unsympathetic. Mary was indeed a proper object of compassion but the fact still remained that she was guilty of most and perhaps all of the misdeeds of which her enemies accused her. Like Voltaire,<sup>9</sup> Hume saw no reason to view the Queen of Scots in her misfortunes as a martyr to any noble cause. Martyred she may very well have been but hers was a martyrdom suffered because of her adultery, her guilty share in the murder of her husband and, in general, her extraordinarily unbridled imprudence. The frailties of human nature, the fury of passion had betrayed the romantic queen into actions which could with some difficulty be accounted for, "but which," Hume writes, "admit of no apology nor even of alleviation."<sup>10</sup> The historian goes on to conclude that, although an enumeration of her qualities might carry the appearance of a panegyric, an account of her conduct "must in some parts wear the aspect of severe satire and invective."<sup>11</sup> It was possible to gild Queen Mary to some extent; but to wash her white was a patent impossibility.<sup>12</sup> In fact the belief that he himself may have "gilded" her too much troubled Hume on at least one occasion sufficiently for him to express his fear to Robertson that they had both "drawn Mary's character with too great softening."<sup>13</sup> Hume's most authentically recorded unsympathetic statement on

<sup>8</sup> Goodall, *op. cit.*, I, p.100.

<sup>9</sup> See the *Essai sur les mœurs* in *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire* (Paris, 1878), XII, pp.496-98.

<sup>10</sup> Hume, *The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688* (London, 1809), VI, p.229.

<sup>11</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> Greig, *op. cit.*, I, p.297.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p.299.

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the subject appears in a private letter to his Jacobite friend Lord Elibank in which he angrily refers to the Queen of Scots as "an old Strumpet, who has been dead and rotten near two hundred Years."<sup>14</sup>

As for the Casket Letters themselves, Hume comments on their authenticity in a note<sup>15</sup> to the *Tudors* in which he contests the forgery theory put forward by Mary's apologists with critical arguments concerning the improbabilities of their case. He notes, for example, that the letters are longer and more involved than they needed to have been in order to serve the purposes of Mary's enemies. Such length would have unnecessarily increased the difficulties of a fraudulent composition and added as well to the risks of detection if the letters had really been forgeries. The letters were carefully examined and compared with authentic specimens of Mary's handwriting not only by the Queen of Scots' enemies, but by her most devoted partisans as well. Even if it could be shown that such scrutiny was lacking in its full effect, Murray and his associates had every reason to think, before presenting the letters, that they would be canvassed with the greatest severity by able adversaries, interested in the highest degree in refuting the evidence as forged. Moreover, the Scottish lords had little reason to run the risk of exposure by such dangerous artifices since their cause, from Mary's known conduct, even without the letters, was "sufficiently good and justifiable."

Conceding nothing to what may have been the personal requirements of a spirited queen's pride, Hume based his major defense of the Casket Letters on the argument that Mary, at the time when the truth could have been fully brought to light "did, in effect, ratify the evidence against her, by recoiling from the inquiry at the very critical moment, and refusing to give an answer to the accusation of her enemies."<sup>16</sup> Mary's refusal to answer the charges *unconditionally* formed, for Hume, a strong presumption against her. In general it could be said that the arguments her apologists proposed against the authenticity of the letters were of "small force" but, the historian concluded, since Mary refused to answer, "were they ever so specious, they cannot now be hearkened to."<sup>17</sup>

We should perhaps not fail to note that this final argument presents an unexpectedly severe line of reasoning, emanating as it did from a

<sup>14</sup> Letter of August 14, 1764, "New Hume Letters to Lord Elibank" (1962), p.456.

<sup>15</sup> Volume II, pp.498-500 of 1759 edition; Note L to Volume V of the collected edition.

<sup>16</sup> *History of England*, V, p.503.

<sup>17</sup> *Loc. cit.*

man who throughout all his literary life took great and frequent pride in never answering the charges brought against him by any of his own numerous adversaries. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that in this inaugural period of apologetic literature relating to the unhappy Queen of Scots Hume's probably correct but somewhat cavalier evaluation of the controversy's merits provoked a number of heated rebuttals. Chief among these was the very popular *Inquiry*<sup>18</sup> of William Tytler, a work which appeared in February, 1760, and which was subsequently re-edited with additions and textual modifications in the years 1767, 1772, and 1790.

Tytler's *Inquiry*, though a less original contribution to the debate than Goodall's *Examination*, was destined to have a good deal more public success. In the eyes of many contemporary readers, it was immediately viewed as a complete vindication of Mary Stuart and one which triumphantly drove the malicious Hume and Robertson from the field. Joining in the victory with an obvious relish, Dr. Samuel Johnson contributed a review of the new apologist's work to the October, 1760, issue of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. The review's thinly-disguised introductory generalities made no attempt to spare Hume or his pretensions to impartiality and independence of mind: "The writers of the present time," Johnson pointedly decreed, "are not always candidates for preferment, nor often the hirelings of a patron. They profess to serve no interest, and speak with loud contempt of sycophants and slaves."<sup>19</sup> These writers, the eminent critic pursued, only delude themselves; though not the slaves of patronage they are yet the slaves of fashion and those who write for sale are tempted to court purchasers by flattering the prejudices of the public. It was only natural that the Stuarts had had few apologists; the dead, after all, cannot pay for praise. Nevertheless, Tytler had exhibited in his recent work a new zeal for truth and "a desire of establishing right, in opposition to fashion."<sup>20</sup>

In the body of the review itself, Johnson went on to list with fairly obvious approval most of Tytler's charges against Hume (paying, all the while, little attention to those against Robertson). He repeated Tytler's observation that assertions apparently contrary to fact are unworthy the character of an historian and may, quite justly, render his decisions with respect to evidences of a higher nature very dubious. Finally, he summed

<sup>18</sup> First published anonymously at Edinburgh as *An Historical and Critical Enquiry into the Evidence produced by the Earls of Murray and Morton against Mary Queen of Scots. With an Examination of the Rev. Dr Robertson's Dissertation, and Mr Hume's History with respect to that Evidence*.

<sup>19</sup> *The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* (Oxford, 1825), VI, p.80.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.81.

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up in the characteristic Johnsonian manner with what must have been one of the most inaccurate predictions of his entire career: "That the letters were forged," Johnson concluded, "is now made so probable, that, perhaps, they will never more be cited as testimonies."<sup>21</sup>

On the continent, where Mary had never lacked support among those traditionalists who regarded her as a victim of English politics and a martyr to the Catholic religion,<sup>22</sup> Tytler's *Inquiry*, in the second edition, was honoured by translation into French.<sup>23</sup> In the preface to this work the ex-Jesuit translator, Father Louis Avril, noted with particular satisfaction that Tytler's was an apology of Mary Stuart "tracée par une plume protestante." The French ecclesiastic went on to make the charge, moreover, that both Hume and Robertson "ont affecté de mépriser les monuments qui contredisaient leurs préjugés, et l'on retrouve dans leurs Ouvrages toutes les calomnies qu'inventa ou répéta autrefois Buchanan contre sa Souveraine et sa bienfaitrice."<sup>24</sup>

On first hearing vague reports of a work written against him, Hume had informed his publisher that he rather felt it would do him good—meaning no doubt that it would increase readership interest in his *Tudors*.<sup>25</sup> He quickly assumed a much less casual attitude, however, when he had had an opportunity to look over Tytler's work. His personal correspondence soon began to bristle with angry references to the unfairness and lack of candour of "this gentleman" or rather "this author" who, he maintained, had called him almost directly "a Lyar & a Rogue & a Rascal" and who was obviously morally akin himself to the thieves and pickpockets of this world, "a very mangey Cur" indeed, for whom "a sound beating or even a Rope" was too good.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.89.

<sup>22</sup> So strong indeed were official French feelings on the subject of the hapless Stuarts that in 1779 Louis XVI's council, preparing a war manifesto against Great Britain, included among its accusations the charge that the House of Hanover held its power through usurpation and also reproached the English with the assassination of Mary Stuart and Charles I. (See *Oeuvres de Louis XVI* (Paris, 1864), II, p.49.)

<sup>23</sup> *Recherches historiques et critiques sur les principales preuves de l'accusation intentée contre Marie Stuart, Reine d'Ecosse. Avec un Examen des Histoires du Docteur Robertson & de M. Hume, par rapport à ces preuves* (Paris, 1772). This translation was re-edited in 1860.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.vi. See also Mlle de Keralio's *Histoire d'Elisabeth*, already mentioned, III, *passim*, in which Hume and Robertson are accused not only of suppressing testimony in Mary's favour, but of actually fabricating evidence against her.

<sup>25</sup> See Greig, *op. cit.*, I, p.317.

<sup>26</sup> See *ibid.*, I, pp.318-21; Klubansky and Mossner, *op. cit.*, pp.58-64; see also the new letter presented below.

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Such heat as we find expressed in the letters just cited (the most severe of which, by the way, may never have been sent) must appear somewhat unusual in a philosopher who had long before vowed never to take active notice of his literary adversaries. But Tytler's *Inquiry* had obviously stung the philosopher in an area where he was most susceptible to feeling the greatest pain: this was not, certainly, in his philosopher's love of calm; it was rather in his quite honest and entirely legitimate vanity as a man of letters. Hume, it must be admitted, worried a great deal about his literary reputation and Tytler, Hume felt and also made very plain in letters to his friends, had attacked his reputation in an underhand way.

One may speculate that Hume's anger on this occasion had yet another source: Tytler had caught Hume out on several easily verifiable points of fact, the account of which he now saw himself obliged to modify for succeeding editions of his *History*. In the first edition of the *Tudors* Hume, using his favourite argument to establish the authenticity of the Casket Letters, had asserted his belief in the validity of the confession extracted from Mary's servant Nicholas Hubert. He had even written that it was useless, at present, to seek improbabilities in this confession or "to magnify the smallest difficulty into a contradiction." It was, he affirmed, "certainly a regular judicial paper, given in regularly and judicially; and ought to have been canvassed at the time, if the persons whom it concerned had been assured of their own innocence."<sup>27</sup> Though he probably never gave up believing in the authenticity of Hubert's confession himself, Hume now found it necessary to admit (albeit privately) that it had come to light long after the Conferences had ended and that it was likely Mary and her commissioners had never heard of it and hence could never have had any opportunity to canvass it.<sup>28</sup>

Hume, as we have just seen, privately and somewhat grudgingly<sup>29</sup> conceded this victory to Tytler; no reference is made, however, in subsequent editions of the *History* to his reasons for suppressing this and another<sup>30</sup> offending passage, both of which were, in fact, dropped rather discreetly and perhaps with a certain lack of that very candour Hume

<sup>27</sup> *Tudors* (1759), II, p.500.

<sup>28</sup> See postscript of Hume's letter to Sir Alexander Dick, in Klibansky and Mossner, *op. cit.*, pp.63-64.

<sup>29</sup> "I have accordingly struck out the last Clause of the Sentence, in case of a second Edition; and shall willingly give this Triumph to the Enquirer; allowing him at the same time to call me, if he pleases, Rogue & Rascal & Lyar for it" (*loc. cit.*).

<sup>30</sup> See *Tudors* (1759), II, p.498.

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found so wanting in his opponent. Perhaps the greatest indignity of all came some years later when the Scottish historian found it necessary even to break his long-standing vow never to answer directly in a literary quarrel. In the 1770 edition of the *Tudors* a new note appeared in which, after bitterly attacking Tytler for misrepresenting his account of the Conferences, Hume concluded as follows:

That whole Enquiry, from beginning to end, is composed of such scandalous artifices; and from this instance the reader may judge of the candour, fair dealing, veracity, and good manners of the Enquirer. There are, indeed, three events in our history, which may be regarded as touchstones of party-men. An English Whig, who asserts the reality of the popish plot, an Irish Catholic, who denies the massacre in 1641, and a Scotch Jacobite, who maintains the innocence of queen Mary, must be considered as men beyond the reach of argument or reason, and must be left to their prejudices.<sup>31</sup>

No doubt more than delighted at having finally provoked the great historian to answer, Tytler in the third edition of his *Inquiry* added a 26-page *Postscript* as a rebuttal to Hume's note:

The author of the History of England, so often mentioned in this Inquiry, has now for many years, with regard to this Essay, preserved a profound silence. But it would seem, that all this while he has been meditating vengeance: he has now stepped out into the world, and aimed a deadly thrust at the Inquiry and its author . . . .

Let not that gentleman, intoxicated as he seems to be with popular applause, assume the character and style of infallible director of opinion, nor presume to wrest from that public, to whose indulgent favour he owes the credit he has obtained, the right which they have of judging for themselves. Had the Historian's judgement of the Inquiry been equitable, he would have found his opinion long ere now justified by the concurring sentiments of the public on his side; but that these sentiments have not concurred with him he seems tacitly to acknowledge, when now, at the distance of a dozen years since the offence, he deigns (contrary to his conduct with his other opponents) to take the offender out of the hands of the public, and to pronounce sentence himself.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Note N to volume V, collected edition.

<sup>32</sup> *An Inquiry, Historical and Critical, into the Evidence against Mary Queen of Scots. And An Examination of the Histories of Dr Robertson and Mr Hume, with respect to that Evidence. The Third Edition, with Additions and a Postscript* (Edinburgh, 1772), pp.363-64. By 1790, the *Inquiry* in its 4th edition had grown to two volumes and included this same *Postscript*, now "Addressed to the Public" (II, pp.341-74).

Other Marian apologists subsequently made much of this same point, that Hume, "who never replied to an adversary before, now replied to Mr. Tytler" (see John Whitaker, *Mary Queen of Scots vindicated* (London, 1788), I, p.v). Whitaker, after referring to Hume's note, speaks of the historian as rallying "with a seeming ferocity of spirit and with a real imbecillity of exertion . . .," but all to no avail since Tytler's *Postscript* settled the matter decisively.



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Commenting further on the recently added note, Tytler pointed out that Hume's impeachment was delivered in terms very inconsistent with his complaints concerning politeness and good manners. "If," Hume's adversary continued, "the Inquirer has, in these respects, been deficient to Mr Hume, (of which he is not at all sensible), that gentleman has now very amply retorted upon him. Who could have suspected the cool Philosopher to be so conversant in terms of the grossest and most illiberal abuse? . . ." <sup>33</sup>

Warming to his subject, Tytler denied Hume's charge that the anonymous Inquirer had been unfair in his use of quotations. He appealed to the impartiality of the public to judge the matter and asserted that he had not quoted "a single or detached passage from him; on the contrary, he has quoted almost the whole of the Historian's narrative concerning Queen Mary's refusal to answer, and like wise her request to be present at the trial of her cause, and that, too, in the Historian's own words." <sup>34</sup>

As can also be seen in the new letter presented below, the debate between Hume and his opponent was at its loudest on this very point concerning Mary's alleged refusal to answer. Tytler accused Hume of condemning Mary unheard since he formed his major presumption of guilt on Mary's "recoiling from the inquiry." On the contrary, Tytler maintained, Mary had agreed to answer but under certain reasonable, equitable and necessary conditions. Hume had, by an unfair inference and by a glaring sophism, converted this positive offer into an absolute refusal. <sup>35</sup> Had the Queen of Scots truly remained silent at the time Murray produced his letters, Hume's argument, Tytler admits, might have been conclusive. But Mary had not remained silent; she had accused her adversaries of producing forged writings against her and, asking that they might be inspected by her or her friends, had even undertaken to prove the forgery. What was the result of all this? The letters were hastily handed back to Murray and Morton and they themselves were sent a-packing to Scotland with their evidence. The result was too that Queen Mary to her dying hour never once saw the letters, and now they were lost, we are told—a fact, Tytler hinted darkly, from which every impartial person could draw the conclusions he thought fit.

I have not encountered any personal record of Hume's reactions to Tytler's postscript of 1772. What probably wounded the Scottish philosopher most in this respect was Tytler's harsh observation that Hume's

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.361.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.366-67.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.376.



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boasted candour was asleep when he silently withdrew from later editions of his *History* the two major assertions of fact detected as false by the *Inquiry*. "But let me ask," Tytler continued acidly, "although the pride of an author would not suffer him to acknowledge those errors to the person who had detected them, in consistency with honour, was not something due to the public, and to the possessors of his first edition?"<sup>36</sup> Hume may well have regretted answering the Inquirer even to the extent that he did and the tradition is probably authentic which has it that he would not remain in the same room with Tytler (a Writer to the Signet and member of the Select Society) if they met at a common friend's.

In fact, although Hume often protested that he liked nothing more than to be reasoned with and argued against, provided such controversy could be carried out politely and according to the usual rules, the reader of his correspondence cannot help feeling at times that the great philosopher-historian occasionally protested too much on the subject. Hearing in 1764, for example, that his friend Lord Elibank was at work preparing a vindication of Queen Mary, Hume's first reaction, his very first thought, seems to have been that such a work would probably put an end to their friendship. And why was this so? Because the Jacobite Elibank might be intemperate or heated in his defense of the Scottish Queen and indulge himself in strokes of satire and in personalities as he dealt with this silly controversy.<sup>37</sup> Now it may be conceded that for Hume to feel such sentiments on that particular occasion is understandable; but to communicate these feelings to Lord Elibank, as he did in no uncertain terms, was quite another matter and suggests that Hume was at least as touchy on the subject, risking as he certainly did in this instance the appearance of blackmail, as any of his wrong-headed Jacobite friends. It seems fairly evident too that in the controversy with Tytler, Hume, as far as intemperance is concerned, attempted to give, both privately and publicly, at least every bit as much as he received.

\* \* \*

The preceding considerations, though necessarily limited in scope, may help to throw light on the circumstances which gave rise to the following hitherto unpublished letter from David Hume to Sir Alexander Dick. Dick was a more than luke-warm defender of Mary Queen of Scots<sup>38</sup> and this letter is one of several which Hume wrote in 1760 con-

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.381.

<sup>37</sup> See "New Hume Letters to Lord Elibank," p.456.

<sup>38</sup> See *Curiosities of a Scots Charta Chest 1600-1800. With the Travels and Memoranda of Sir Alexander Dick, Baronet of Prestonfield, Midlothian, Written by Himself*. Edited and arranged by the Hon<sup>ble</sup> Mrs. Atholl Forbes. (Edinburgh, 1897) pp.193-94.

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cerning Tytler's *Inquiry*. It deals in particular with remarks made on this subject by John Campbell of Cawdor Castle and Stackpole Court, in letters addressed to Sir Alexander Dick but which Hume was evidently given an opportunity to examine.<sup>39</sup>

\* \* \*

*Letter from David Hume to Sir Alexander Dick, November 1, 1760.*

Dear Sir

I receivd great Pleasure & Satisfaction from Mr Campbells Letter,<sup>40</sup> which you was so good to send me; & shoud be ashamd of being so late in answering it, had I not been out of Town almost ever since I receivd it, and have not settled so long as was requisite to consider these Matters. I own, I admire Mr Campbells Candour; and next to the Credit of converting him entirely to our Opinion (I mean Dr Robertson's & mine) I should be ambitious of being brought over to his. For after the Honour of being always in the Right (which is impossible) I think the most honourable thing is to be convincd (& to own it) that one has been in the wrong.<sup>41</sup>

I shall just mention a Remark in Mr Campbells former Letter, where he thinks that both Dr Robertson & I are in the wrong, when we lay an equal Stress on the Proofs of Darnely's Conspiracy against Murray as on those of Murray against Darnely at the Kirk of Beith. I own I am of his Opinion: The latter Proofs were certain: The former go little beyond Affirmation. But if Mr Campbell will be so good as to look into my History, he will find I there say so; & I have since had some Argument

<sup>39</sup> See also Letter 31 in Klubansky and Mossner, *op cit.*, pp.58-64 and notes 3 and 4 on p.58. The editors appear to be in error when they refer in note 4 to "Campbell's letter to Hume of 26 Sept. 1760"; the letter in question (see *Curiosities of a Scots Charta Chest*, pp.189-91) is addressed to Sir Alexander Dick although Dick obviously passed letters from Hume on to Campbell (see endorsement below) and letters from Campbell on to Hume. The new letter is to be found in the invaluable Bliss Collection at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (Fonds Franc. Nouv. Acq. 23162, Fol. 128-31). The cover on the letter is endorsed, apparently in Dick's hand, as follows: "This Letter Sir Alexander Dick receivd from Mr David Hume Nov<sup>r</sup> 8 1760 which he now transmitts to Mr Campbell in Pembrokeshire which he will please return after he has fully perusd it."

<sup>40</sup> See preceding note. Campbell had apparently been impressed with some aspects of Tytler's *Inquiry* and, though he took a more moderate stand than the Inquirer, he believed, contrary to Hume, that the Earl of Murray was guilty of complicity in the murder of Darnley. (See his letter of September 26, 1760, in *Curiosities of a Scots Charta Chest*, pp.189-91.)

<sup>41</sup> Expressions of such high-sounding sentiment are not infrequent in Hume's correspondence but that Hume really meant them in more than a conventional sense is, at least with respect to the Marian controversy, somewhat doubtful.

about that Matter with Dr Robertson, since his Publication.<sup>42</sup> But indeed, I have the good Fortune to agree with the Doctor in so many points, that it was natural for Mr Campbel to presume we had also agreed in that.

I do not know, whether I ever told you, that the Dr & I, tho we knew we were writing the same Period, & saw one another every day, yet we never communicated our Manuscripts to each other, except a few Books of the Doctors, which he allowd me to peruse. I proposd to him to communicate the Whole to each other, & mutually to correct our Pieces, and reason about all the Points wherein we differd. After some Deliberation, he declind the Proposal; and said very modestly, that if my Work open any new Views or containd any remarkable Strokes, it woud be very difficult for him to pass them by without adopting them, & he woud rather be taken for an indifferent Writer than a Plagiary. After Publication, we might talk over the Matter as much as we pleas'd.<sup>43</sup>

I shall now mention a few particulars of Mr Campbels Letter, where I really regret we shoud differ: For as I said before, I have a great Desire to be of the same Mind with him.<sup>44</sup> I cannot but think, that the laying these Letters before Q. Elizabeth & her Council, and that Queen's throwing down along with them, a great Number of Mary's Letters that the

<sup>42</sup> Hume states in the *History* that it is difficult to clear up this question of mutual accusations but he added a note (*Tutors*, 1759, II, p.463; note G to volume V, collected edition) affirming that certain evidence served to justify the account "given by the Queen's party of the Raid of Baith, as it is called." He judged, however, that the conspiracy of which Murray complained "is much more uncertain, and is founded on very doubtful evidence." Robertson in *The History of Scotland* (I, p.285) notes as follows: "The reality of these two opposite conspiracies has given occasion to many disputes, and much contradiction. Some deny that any design was formed against the life of Murray; others call in question the truth of the conspiracy against Darnly. There seem, however, to be good reasons for believing both . . ." Tytler had found Hume less partial on this point than Robertson. It was important for Mary's apologists to stress that Murray's early conspiracy against Darnley was real and that the Queen's marriage crossed his ambitions. The prospect of the Queen's issue, it was argued, would cut off all his future hopes. The implication of course is that these black designs lay long brooding in the heart of the Queen of Scot's natural brother, gradually unfolded as time passed, and came fully to light only with the forgery of the Casket Letters.

<sup>43</sup> A discussion of what are described as Robertson's "jealous suspicions" in this matter may be found in E. C. Mossner's *Life*, p.397. Robertson had actually gone so far as to request Hume not to write on the same period as himself (see Hume's letter to Robertson of January 25, 1759, Greig, *op. cit.*, I, p.294). The two historians had in fact communicated so little on the subject that Hume, who was given permission by Robertson in 1758 to look over the corrected proofs of *The History of Scotland*, found himself much relieved to discover that his friend asserted in that work "the authenticity of Mary's letters to Bothwell, with the consequence which must necessarily follow" (see letter to Robertson, November 18, 1758, *ibid.*, I, pp.287-88).

<sup>44</sup> See *supra*, note 41.

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handwriting might be compared; I say I think this a strong external Proof of the Genuineness of these Letters. Consider that Norfolk, Westmoreland, Northumberland were of the Number; all of whom were afterwards forfeited in Mary's Cause & two of them lost their Lives. Q. Elizabeth at that time pretended to be neutral; & they ran no risque, except perhaps of a Frown, if they had said, the handwriting appeared not to be the same. And would not something of their Sentiments on that head have transpired afterwards? But we find by Norfolk's Trial, that even after that Examination, Norfolk said in private to his Friend & Confidant, Bannister, that he thought Q. Mary guilty.

Besides Murray & Morton had all the Reason in the World to expect, that Lesly & Herreis & others of Mary's Commissioners would be present at the Examination. That they were not so was entirely their own Fault; & never could have happened, had they not known their Mistresses Guilt, & known these Letters to be genuine.<sup>45</sup>

I am sorry Mr Campbell has not a Copy of Goodall:<sup>46</sup> He would have seen that the Enquirer has employed against me one of the most scandalous & dirty Tricks that ever was made use of in Controversy; but it is a Trick so frequent that one would almost pass for ridiculous, if they conceived any Indignation against it. It is that of mutilating the Quotations, & produc-

<sup>45</sup> This is the very essence of Hume's position concerning the authenticity of the Casket Letters.

<sup>46</sup> Hume, writing to Lord Elibank in 1760 after the appearance of Tytler's *Inquiry*, informed his correspondent that it was "Contempt & not Inability" which had kept him, as it had kept Robertson, from making a reply to their "common Answerer" (Greig, *op cit.*, I, p.318). He added that Goodall, though not a very calm or indifferent advocate in the cause, disowned nevertheless the Inquirer as an associate "and confesses to me & all the World that I am here right in my Facts, and am only wrong in my Inferences" (*ibid.*, I, p.321). One would, of course, like to see other evidence besides Hume's affirmation in exact support of this claim since Goodall was probably even more vehemently committed to the defense of the Scottish Queen than Tytler who in his *Inquiry* in fact popularized much of his predecessor's documentation. Goodall, for example, defends the position that "neither Queen Mary, nor her commissioners could ever obtain a sight of these letters, nor yet copies of them, tho' they several times demanded them of Queen Elizabeth and her court" (*Examination*, I, p.ix). He even goes so far as to affirm the absurd proposition that Mary Queen of Scots so far excelled all other sovereigns "who ever yet appeared on the face of the earth, that, as if she had not been of mortal nature, all the arts and contrivances of her numerous and malicious enemies have not availed to fix upon her one crime . . . nay, not one single foible, either while on the throne, or in the jail, from her cradle to her grave . . ." (*ibid.*, I, p.xxviii). Tytler, in the 4th edition of the *Inquiry*, states that Goodall's vindication of Mary, when first published, was, without proper examination, received as a "piece of Quixotism" (*op. cit.*, I, p.20), and that his own *Inquiry* was intended to defend Goodall who, though urged at the time by several friends to reply to Hume and Robertson, "declined, from an honest indignation at the uncandid reception his book had met with" (*ibid.*, pp.23-24).

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ing only what makes for one's own Side, while all the rest is suppress'd. He quotes a long Passage, where Q. Mary offers, in very stout & bold terms, to answer, & desires Copies of the forgd Letters. He takes no Notice, both that that Defiance refers to a former Letter, where it is made an express Condition that she be admitted to Q. Elizabeths Presence and also that Q. Elizabeth, before she breaks up the Conference altogether, calls Q. Mary's Commissioners into her Presence, & offers to give them Copies provided they will promise to answer without insisting on that Condition, and will get their Commission renewd: For, she tells them, that she understands it is expird or recalld and that therefore they cannot answer. This is the last Transaction at Hampton-court.

To put the Inquirer's Unfairness in a full Light to Mr Campbell, I beg him to consider that the Author never dares say, that Q. Mary offerd to answer without that Condition: Goodalls Papers are too direct a Proof of the contrary. Where then do we differ? Only in this particular as I said to you in my last.<sup>47</sup> He insists that *she offerd to answer provided she was admitted to Q. Elizabeths Presence*. I say, *that she refusd to answer unless she was admitted*. And for this, he insinuates or rather says plainly that I am a Rogue, a Rascal, & a Lyar. Is such a Fellow worth regarding or answering?<sup>48</sup>

I agree with Mr Campbell, that much Stress ought not to be laid on Huberts Confession;<sup>49</sup> it comes to us in such a blind way: But it may be mentioned in the heap of other Proofs. As to the long Delay of his Trial & Execution, we may suppose, that he maintaind for so long a time Fidelity to his Trust, & was at last brought by the Rack to confess. The Use of the Rack weakens a Proof from Confessions; but does not entirely destroy it; otherwise there woud be no Evidence except in this Island, where alone that Instrument of Torture is happily abolishd.

As to the Forgery of Q. Mary's Letter after the Affair of Carberry Hill, we have that Story only from Sir James Melvil, who is the most

<sup>47</sup> Apparently Hume's letter from Edinburgh of August 26, 1760, in which he makes much the same statement. (See Klibansky and Mossner, *op. cit.*, p.60.)

<sup>48</sup> Hume felt, perhaps incorrectly, that these were "positive & negative Propositions of the same Import" (see his letter to Lord Elbank, Greig, *op. cit.*, I, p.320). Hume charged that Mary's offer to answer, being grounded on a condition which the Queen of Scots did not expect to be granted, and which accordingly was denied, was "certainly equivalent to a simple & absolute Refusal" (*ibid.*, I, p.319). Tytler accused Hume of basing this major conclusion on mere conjecture and of converting "a positive offer, under a condition reasonable, equitable, and necessary, into an absolute refusal" (*Inquiry*, 3rd edition, p.376).

<sup>49</sup> Hume, yielding to Tytler's criticism on this point, had already struck out the passage concerning Hubert's confession "in case of a second Edition" (*supra*, note 29).



enticing deceitful Author in the World. He has throughout all his Memoirs such an Air of Candour & Sincerity that we are extremely inclin'd to believe him; yet is he such an idle Prater and can be disprovd in so many things, which he tells from his own Knowledge, that no Credit can be given him. However, I think, with Mr Campbel, that, if such a Letter was ever shown to Kirkaldy, it was probably a Forgery. But by whom it was shown, I think Sir James does not tell us; & Murray had at that time left Scotland.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Hume is here referring to a letter supposedly written by Mary to Bothwell shortly after her surrender to the Scottish lords at Carberry Hill. Mary, after a negotiation with Kirkaldy of Grange who commanded an advanced body of the enemy forces, received his promise, with the consent and in the name of the associated lords, that, on condition she dismiss Bothwell from her presence and govern the kingdom by the advice of her nobles, they would honour and obey her as their sovereign. The lords, however, on making her prisoner, considered themselves absolved from this commitment by what was alleged to be her incurable attachment to Bothwell. Melville's account is as follows:

" . . . it was alledged that her Majesty did write a Letter unto the Earl of *Bothwel*, and promised a reward to one of her keepers to convoy it securely to *Dunbar* unto the said Earl, calling him her dear heart whom she should never forget nor abandon, though she was necessitated to be absent from him for a time, saying, that she had sent him away only for his safety, willing him to be comforted, and be upon his guard. Which Letter the Knave delivered to the Lords, though he had promised the contrary: Upon which Letter the Lords took occasion to send her to *Lockleven* to be kept, which she alledged was contrary to promise. They on the other hand affirmed, that by her own hand writing she had declared that she had not, nor would not abandon the Earl of *Bothwel*. *Grange* again excused her, alledging she had in effect abandoned the said Earl, that it was no wonder that she gave him yet a few fair words, not doubting but if she were discreetly handled, and humbly admonished what inconveniences that Man had brought upon her, she would by degrees be brought, not only to leave him, but e're long to detest him: And therefore he advised to deal gently with her. But they said, that it stood them upon their Lives and Lands, and that therefore in the mean time they behoved to secure her, and when that time came that she should be known to abandon and detest the Earl *Bothwel*, it would be then time to reason upon the matter. *Grange* was yet so angry, that had it not been for the Letter, he had instantly left them . . . " (*The Memoirs of Sir James Melvil of Hal-Hill* (London, 1683), p.84.)

Though, paradoxically, embroidering to some extent in his text on Melville's description of the letter's contents, Hume had already noted in the *Tudors* (1st edition, II, p.483) that "the reality of this letter appears somewhat disputable; chiefly because Murray and his associates never mentioned it in their accusation of her before Queen Elizabeth's commissioners." It may be noted, nevertheless, that Hume made rather frequent use of the "enticing deceitful prater," Melville, as a documentary source on this whole period.

One may conjecture that an additional reason why Hume was willing to give up even the existence of this letter lay in the fact that it argued, since nothing more was heard of it, really more in defense of the Queen of Scots than against her. Mary's partisans could and did maintain that it was the crude prototype, if it existed, of

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There are three Folio Volumes of Manuscripts in the Advocates Library, copyd from the Burleigh Books in the Cotton Library; & the Transcriber observes, that in the very place, where the Copies of Q. Mary's Letters shoud have been, there are evidently several Leaves cut out of the Original. It is easy to see that this must have been done after K. James's Accession; which, with what Dr Robertson has said, sufficiently accounts for the Dissappearance of the original French.<sup>51</sup> Q. Elizabeth never would publish them; because she pretended always to be neutral: Murray might have done it; but the Scotch sufficd, he thought, for this Country & England; Latin for Foreigners. French was not then the general Tongue as to present.<sup>52</sup>

Thus I have finishd, Dear Sir, every thing material I had to say of Mr Campbells Letter; and acknowlege myself much obligd to him for the Pains he has taken, & to you for communicating his Sentiments to me. I am

Edinburgh  
1 Novr 1760

Dear Sir  
Your most obedient humble  
Servant

David Hume

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all the later forgeries. Though effective enough to permit the Queen's incarceration and plausible enough in appearance to deceive the unpracticed eye of Kirkaldy, it was a hasty effort and prudently suppressed once it had served its purpose. The success of this first venture in fraud, it was argued, encouraged Mary's enemies to make, only with more skillful preparations, their grand attempt later on.

<sup>51</sup> Robertson in his "Critical Dissertation" (p.38) writes as follows: "Whether James VI who put the Earl of Gowrie to death, A.D. 1584 and seized all his effects, took care to destroy his mother's letters, for whose honour he was at that time extremely zealous; whether they have perished by some unknown accident; or whether they may not still remain unobserved among the archives of some of our great families, it is impossible to determine." For Hume too, the disappearance of the original documents was an argument, not in favour of their forgery as Mary's defenders insisted, but quite obviously in support of their authenticity: "That event," he states in his note on the Casket Letters, "can be accounted for no way but from the care of King James's friends, who were desirous to destroy every proof of his mother's crimes." (See item 15, note L to volume V, collected edition.)

<sup>52</sup> Hume, it would appear, is here clutching at straws. If French was not then "the general Tongue," it was not, for all that, the language of some primitive distant tribe; the originals, after all, *were in French*. That Latin did not suffice for foreigners is made equally clear, moreover, by the fact that, as Hume knew very well, a contemporary French "translation of a translation" had appeared in print soon after.